

Agency to Manage U.S. Volunteers For Prosperity

Thousands of American doctors, bankers, engineers, and other skilled people are expected to be sent overseas under the Volunteers for Prosperity initiative, a new USAID-managed program that begins in July 2003.

The presidential initiative, announced May 21 by President Bush, differs from the

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Volunteers for Prosperity

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Peace Corps. It will not send people fresh out of college or grad school, and volunteers will not have to commit for two years, said USAID's Kenneth A. Lanza, who was detailed from USAID's Bureau for Europe and Eurasia to the White House to direct and manage the new program. Lanza will work under USA Freedom Corps Director John Bridgeland.

Because volunteers will be skilled specialists, they will be useful even for short and flexible periods, said Lanza. For example, a surgeon could perform operations and train his counterparts during a two- or three-week mission. And in just a few days, a banker might be able to give important direction to a central bank in a developing country.

The volunteers will be attached to NGOs or other development groups. Each group has its own rules, but most will pay airfare and per diems and provide orientation and training. It is unlikely the volunteers will receive pay or honoraria.

The first volunteers are going to Senegal at the end of July. They are part of the Digital Freedom Initiative, aimed at helping set up computer and internet systems for business and other purposes.

The first programs to use Volunteers for Prosperity are the six that carry out presidential foreign assistance initiatives: Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Water for the Poor, Digital Freedom Initiative, Trade for Africa Development and Enterprise, Middle East

Partnership Initiative, and the Millennium Challenge Account. All have significant USAID involvement.

Administrator Natsios sent an executive message to all USAID personnel asking all offices to include volunteers in initiative activities. "Highly skilled volunteers can bring new perspectives and insights to our work, making us more efficient at relatively low cost," he said.

Lanza said: "I talked to the American Association of Engineering Societies, which has 1 million members and many of them want to volunteer. They have nuclear, electrical, civil, and other engineers who can help with water for the poor and other projects."

The new volunteer system will allow a physician in Chicago who wants to volunteer for three months helping HIV/AIDS patients in Uganda to contact USA Freedom Corps or USAID to find a match with an organization that is working in Uganda, needs highly skilled volunteers, and has funding from an initiative such as the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Some of the organizations working to support the first six federally supported initiatives that can use volunteers overseas right now include Catholic Medical Mission Board, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, and the International Executive Service Corps. ★

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